

FAIRHOPE: THE BONDS OF COMMUNITY -  
THE FIRST TEN YEARS

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In 1894 a small group of men, women, and children journeyed to Alabama to establish a community called Fairhope which they hoped would be marked by "harmony, cooperation, and mutuality of interests, rather than conflict, competition, and exploitation" characteristic of "imperfect societies."<sup>1</sup> They believed that "by providing material and psychological safety and security," Fairhope would eliminate "the need for divisive competition or self-serving actions which elevate some people to the disadvantage of others" and instead ensure "the flowering of mutual responsibility and trust, to the advantage of all."<sup>2</sup> Fairhope was 'just' one of many attempts in the nineteenth century to establish a society based upon a new social order. Unlike most of these experiments, Fairhope met with much success in its search for utopia. This study, in its examination of Fairhope's first ten years of existence (1895-1904), seeks to explain why Fairhope is one of the few sectarian utopian communities in the United States which achieved longevity.

To understand the factors which held the community together, it is helpful to combine a sociological with a traditional historical approach to this subject. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her sociological study of communes and utopias called Commitment and Community, presents a useful method of analyzing a community such as Fairhope. She notes that "the primary issue with which a utopian community must cope in order to have the strength and solidarity to endure is its human organization: how people arrange to do the work that the community needs to survive as a group, and how the group in turn manages to satisfy and involve its members over a long period of time."<sup>3</sup> In order to survive, Fairhope thus has to instill a sense of commitment to the community in its members so that they were "loyal and involved" and had "a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group (was) an extension of (themselves) and that (they were) an extension of the group."<sup>4</sup> Kanter's approach involves an examination of the community for characteristics which foster this feeling of commitment. These commitment 'mechanisms' fall under the five general categories of Investment, Sacrifice, Renunciation, Communion, and Transcendence. This paper will utilize this sociological framework

to explain the development of the 'spirit of Fairhope' which, by 1905, ensured the longevity of the community.

Sacrifice was one of the most prominent aspects of life in the early years of Fairhope. Kanter notes that the process of Sacrifice "involves the giving up of something considered valuable or pleasurable in order to belong to the organization."<sup>5</sup> The essential principle is that as "membership becomes more costly," it is more highly regarded and less likely to be easily relinquished."<sup>6</sup> Sacrifice took the form of an austere life style in Fairhope; the colonists had to work very hard to build their community and to make an adequate living.

The first members, a small group of twenty - eight, arrived in Fairhope in December 1895 with only their belongings and a will to succeed. The colony site was table land adjacent to Mobile Bay. Although the area was beautiful, it had notably poor quality soil, was covered with trees, and was relatively isolated from other communities. Unfamiliar with the land, the Fairhope pioneers experimented with a variety of crops, often meeting with dismal failure. As a result, the Courier, Fairhope's bi - monthly newspaper, is filled with discussions of proposals for growing more successful crops during the colony's early years. Few in number, these Fairhoppers only planted crops of limited size because of the difficulty of clearing their land of trees. In addition, even though many of the settlers planted fruit trees, which grew well in that area, soon after they arrived, they were unable to reap any benefits for a few years when the trees matured. Regardless of their farming skills, the Fairhoppers had to contend with occasional droughts and frosts which damaged their crops and fruit trees. During the colony's first ten years, the Courier recorded a total of six damaging spring/summer droughts and two harmful frosts. As there were few other means of earning a living in Fairhope during the first five years, the residents strove for

self-sufficiency; most kept sizeable private gardens, flocks of chickens, and often went fishing.

In addition to the difficulty of earning a living, Fairhoppers were faced with the formidable task of constructing their private homes and their village's public facilities. They banded together to cut down trees to clear out crude roads and to erect a town hall and dig a town well. Such group efforts were necessitated by the Fairhope Industrial Association's lack of money to hire professionals to do these jobs.

This hard life led many early members to leave and still others to depart because they were unable to earn a living. These conditions probably deterred many other potential members from ever coming, or at least from coming until much later, when Fairhope was a thriving, prosperous village. The Courier, which was read by many interested outsiders, frequently emphasized the importance for newcomers to Fairhope to be able to employ themselves and not hope to depend upon others for employment. Marie Howland, a resident and associate editor of the Courier, summarized this situation well when she wrote in 1899 that "we are poor and suffering here as elsewhere. Now we have to discourage people from coming who have no means to start with." <sup>7</sup> Twenty separate families/individuals who came to Fairhope with the intention of staying had left the community by 1900, leaving behind a colony consisting of just 100 people.

Fairhope saw much more rapid growth in terms of people, business, and public improvements over the next four years. The community benefitted from a marked increase in its year-round tourist industry and the increasing amount of land available for cultivation. These developments resulted in increased rents which provided Fairhope with additional money for public facilities. During this period, comments on Fairhope's steadily increasing exports to other communities and its relative prosperity in comparison with neighboring communities occasionally appeared in the Courier. Although the number of people leaving Fairhope for economic reasons declined significantly during these years, residents still had to work hard to earn an adequate living. In general, during the first ten years, people left Fairhope primarily because they were unable to make a good living. That Fairhope



made substantial economic gains from 1901 to 1904 is evident by the fact that out of fifty separate families/individuals who came to Fairhope during this period with the intention of staying, only six had left the colony by 1905.

The constant demand for sacrifice resulted in increased commitment to the survival of the community by those who successfully braved the colony's first five years. This sense of commitment derived from sacrifice was less marked in residents who arrived after the early settlers had made Fairhope a more comfortable and prosperous village. These newer residents, not required to make as great of a sacrifice, acquired a more shallow feeling of commitment and were thus more likely to criticize various aspects of the community.

The necessity for Sacrifice in Fairhope was complemented by the process of Investment required of members. Members of the Fairhope Industrial Association had to make a financial contribution to the community, thus providing them with a stake in the fate of the colony; the greater the contribution, the more costly it was for them to depart.

Initially, Fairhoppers had to pay \$200 in order to obtain membership in the colony's government and the right to reside on the land. This fee amounted to a considerable sum of money in the 1890s and, before the colonists set out for Fairhope in 1895, was required in totality before one could settle in Fairhope. This demand proved to be too much for many so that soon after their arrival in 1895, the first settlers decided to permit members to pay the fee in \$5 monthly installments; members were not, however, permitted full constitutional rights if they were delinquent in their payments. In response to complaints of numerous would-be Fairhoppers, this fee was reduced to \$100 in 1896. Although the ostensible purpose of the fee was to enable Fairhope to extend its territory, build the wharf, pave its streets, and to acquire various public facilities, its effect was to deter from coming those who were not fully committed to the general reformist goals of Fairhope. One result was that Fairhope tended, in its early years, to attract mostly reformist-minded settlers. This fee, although paid in installments, gave these early Fairhoppers a financial stake in the survival of the community. As E.B. Gaston perhaps more appropriately summarized in 1900, the membership fee

"separated the sheep from the goats, or those who mean't business from those who lacked the nerve to back <sup>8</sup>up their professions with their cash."

The stake provided by this mandatory fee was weakened considerably, however, by the Fairhope Industrial Association's (FIA) policy of permitting members to sell their memberships, upon their departure, to others for use toward the payment of rent or a membership fee. That this facilitated members' departure from the colony is evident, for example, in 1899 when four new members bought memberships from those who were leaving.

The heaviest blow to the stake fostered by the membership fee came in 1896 when the colonists decided to permit people to rent land in the colony without becoming members of the FIA. The avowed purpose of this momentous policy change was to give persons intending membership an opportunity to become familiar with Fairhope before undertaking the task of paying the membership fee. This decision was to have far-reaching effects, both economically and ideologically, in the colony's future. Soon after the implementation of this policy, immigration to Fairhope, as predicted, increased significantly. Fewer of these residents, as time went on, applied for membership, however, and the Courier consequently acknowledged, in 1900, that the lack of applications was due to this liberal policy; at this point there were only 24 resident members in Fairhope. Those who were more firmly committed to Fairhope's ideological goals were more likely to apply for membership, while those who considered the community just as another place to live were more likely to rent land as a non-member and thus derive less of a commitment to Fairhope. Not only were the non-member residents consequently more likely to leave in the face of initial <sup>d</sup>harshness, but also tended to criticize the FIA's management of the community to a much greater extent than did resident members. Since only members could cast votes in regard to FIA policy and as the non-member residents' numbers increased steadily after 1900, friction between the two groups grew.

Another, more indirect, source for Investment resulted from the use of scrip in Fairhope. The FIA used scrip to pay for all services; these colony notes were not redeemable in cash but could only be used to pay rent or the membership fee.

Within a few years, many hundreds of dollars worth of scrip were in circulation as currency among the Fairhope residents. The use of scrip, worthless outside of the colony, thus was one more means of tightening the residents' financial ties to Fairhope.

During the first year of Fairhope's existence, members were required to pay the FIA an additional \$50 in exchange for \$50 of scrip. The FIA used this money to finance the operation of the community's cooperative general store, called the Fairhope Mercantile Department. In addition to rent and membership fee payments, this scrip could, like all scrip, be used to purchase goods at the store. In the face of tremendous opposition and operation difficulties, the Mercantile Department store and the \$50 contribution requirement were abolished within six months after its inception.

Both the Sacrifice and the Investment processes dealt with Fairhoppers' commitment to the viability of the community itself. These commitment mechanisms together influenced the most important decision underlying all other decisions that all residents of Fairhope constantly made - whether to stay or leave.<sup>9</sup> During the first ten years of the community many more non-member than member residents left Fairhope.

The increasing cohesion of Fairhoppers as a community was made possible, to a significant extent, by Renunciation, the process of relinquishing relationships that are potentially disruptive to group cohesion.<sup>10</sup> The ending of most of such relations led resident Fairhoppers to rechannel the feelings and energy involved in their former relationships to new ones within the community.

In Fairhope the most pronounced and unavoidable aspect of life, especially in the first few years, was geographical isolation from neighboring communities. This situation encouraged the colonists to strive for self-sufficiency and to turn to their own community for social and intellectual outlets. Initially there were no connecting roads to neighboring communities, the nearest one being 5 miles away. In addition, Fairhope had few neighbors adjacent or close to Fairhope land for a number of years. Not until 1897 was a road built to connect Fairhope with the



closest community. Even then Fairhope did not acquire a livery until 1899. For transportation by water, the colonists built a wharf on the bay near the end of their first year. Other than Captain George Lawrence's boat, which went between Fairhope and Mobile once or twice each week, few boats stopped at the Fairhope wharf regularly in the early years. As time went on, Captain Lawrence put an additional boat into service and finally, in 1901, Fairhope got its own boat which ran frequently and directly between Fairhope and Mobile. Thus faced with poor transportation either by water or land, especially during the first five years, Fairhoppers limited their contacts with the outside world to a minimum.

The colonists also seemed to leave Fairhope to travel no more than once each year, if even that much. This situation was probably due, in part, to their lack of money and partially due to the demands which tending their crops and building their village made upon their time. Whenever they travelled, they usually visited relatives or took care of business. After 1900, when the community became more prosperous, Fairhoppers seemed to travel around more frequently.

In addition to this 'forced' geographical isolation from the outside world, Fairhoppers had to contend with what they perceived as an ignorant and hostile society. They were well aware that the general society was none too receptive to the single tax theory. It was almost natural therefore with this feeling, combined with the colonists' view that Fairhope was not only a single tax community but a way to escape the present injustices of a corrupt society, that Fairhoppers avoided contact with 'outsiders' whom they generally assumed would be hostile. Their neighbors apparently did nothing initially to dispel these notions and believed Fairhope to be some type of socialist or communist community. Although steady contact with their neighbors eventually fostered better relations, Gaston acknowledged in 1898 that "time was when people looked upon us largely as freaks. On further acquaintance with us, however, they find us to be a broad-minded, cultured, energetic people."

Thus geographically and socially isolated from the society around them, Fairhoppers, in the early years, turned inward in search of emotional and economic support. This was made possible to a great extent by the establishment of a number



of public facilities and various clubs.

This sense of isolation decreased somewhat after 1900 as Fairhope began to experience an increasingly large and constant influx of visitors. Earlier, relatives were the main visitors, but others came as Fairhope grew into a summer and winter resort. Furthermore as more people without much concern for the single tax settled in the community, their neighbors more and more viewed Fairhope as just another village.

In the wake of this isolation from the outside world came many developments which served as substitutes for the Fairhoppers' former relationships in the greater society. The residents engaged in a variety of activities which fostered Communion, a feeling of collective unity in which it seemed only natural for the preferences of all to be identical in regard to matters concerning the community's formal organization and operation. Successful communion is marked by a feeling of belonging, participation with others on an equal basis, and the mingling of the 'self' in the group; it develops equality, fellowship, and group consciousness and leads to the formation of a cohesive, emotionally involving and satisfying community. Various factors in Fairhope resulted in such a situation:

Most of the original Fairhope pioneers had never met before. Although many of the later settlers were relatives of those already in the colony, the majority of these residents were unacquainted with each other and came from different states and some even from different nations. What the early Fairhoppers did, however, have in common was a strong interest in reform; they were anxious to change society for the better through this experiment. That the FIA was primarily interested in attracting this type of settler is evident by the questions in the membership application which inquired about the applicant's reformist background. In addition those without such convictions were less likely to cast their lot with Fairhope during its first few years when the settlers were still struggling to build up their village. Most of these reformers were also well educated and most were of the same relatively low economic class, neither rich nor poor. Although the bond common to all reformers helped tie them together, the passage of the FIA's liberal rental policy in 1896 and Fairhope's increasing prosperity after 1900 attracted many set-

tlers who were neither reformist-minded nor particularly well educated; they just came with no intention other than to make a living. Although many of these newcomers became imbued with the Fairhope reformist spirit, a sizeable number remained indifferent and later became hostile to the colonists' ideological goals. Fairhope consequently developed, on this level, into a community which, by 1904, was marked by the presence of a small core of devoted reformers (generally FIA members), a larger group sympathetic to these reformers' principles and related efforts, a group of residents indifferent to such efforts, and a small, but ever-increasing and vocal group of residents who were actively hostile to ideological aspects of Fairhope.

The common ownership of land (by the FIA) in Fairhope also fostered a 'we' feeling by eliminating ownership as a factor in a person's identification or status.

In the first years of Fairhope the settlers had to work together on projects which they all needed, otherwise, they would not get completed; the FIA lacked the money to pay for many of the desired public improvements. The FIA philosophy underlying this communal work as well as other similar group activities was called 'cooperative individualism'. In accordance with this principle, the FIA encouraged, but did not require, communal work in Fairhope in the public interest. Most Fairhoppers exhibited a strong cooperative spirit, banding together to build all of their community's roads during the first ten years; much of this work was done with volunteer labor or paid for with scrip. Most of the residents, especially in the first few years when it was most needed, participated in public work projects. In 1896, for example, the Courier noted how every day there were a few people working voluntarily on the streets. By 1897, almost all of the Fairhope men had agreed to devote two Saturdays each month for four hours each day to volunteer work on community public projects. The residents thus worked together to cut roads to other communities and built public facilities such as their wharf, town hall, and schoolhouse, often donating supplies as well as labor. The FIA Superintendent of Public Works directed this volunteer work. One incentive to contributing to these activities was the knowledge that the community as a whole, not individual landowners, would directly benefit from these improvements; the resulting increases in land values would be col-

lected by the FIA to be spent in the public interest.

The women of Fairhope also contributed to these community projects. A group of them formed the Fairhope Village Improvement Club (VIC) in 1899 to organize the maintenance of the community grounds and to raise money for public projects deemed important for Fairhope such as bridges, a public school, a library, an assembly room and a power boat. At first, the VIC successfully got the colonists to clean up their public park and pavillian. For fund-raising, the club organized frequent 'sociables' at which entertainment was usually provided or food sold in return for donations. Men, women, and children put on literary, dramatic, or musical performances for the benefit of this activity. Most of the Fairhope community attended these gatherings, either as participants or as spectators.

Most Fairhope men and women thus participated in volunteer group activities to improve their community. From these general group efforts, they consequently derived a greater sense of unity.

Another means of involvement in the community was the use of the "Guernsey Market House Plan" to finance public works. Everyone had the opportunity to subscribe to the projects with money, labor, or materials in return for certificates which eventually were redeemable for cash. All subscriptions were duly recorded and acknowledged in the Courier along with an expression of thanks. Many Fairhoppers contributed in this manner to public works and thus enjoyed a heightened feeling of participation in their community.

The colonists also came together for regular social, educational, and political activities. Most of these meetings were open only to Fairhoppers and their guests, and some were either for men or women only. At these gatherings, for whatever purpose, all Fairhoppers were accorded equal opportunities to participate and were treated as equals. Cut off from the rest of the world, Fairhoppers looked to these activities for relationships and in so doing reinforced their sense of community.

At the outset of Fairhope, the pioneers entertained each other with receptions in their private homes. These affairs ranged from small literary and musical programs to the welcoming of visitors and new residents. In addition, they all gathered together on Monday evenings to listen to the reading of letters from people interested



in Fairhope. Everyone also met once each month to socialize at a picnic in their park and once each month for a general citizens' meeting where all aspects of the community's affairs were discussed.

In the second year at Fairhope, the colonists began meeting in their park every Sunday afternoon for a few hours to discuss various subjects of interest. These gatherings, later termed the Progressive League, were open to residents and their guests. An appointed chairman kept the discussions orderly and anyone could speak on a topic - usually one person would make a twenty minute speech on a previously agreed upon subject and others then followed with comments, limited to ten minutes, on the speech. Topics ranged from local matters such as "What is practical to do in the way of cooperation?" to national issues such as "What is Socialism?" as well as religious subjects such as "What is Christianity?." One Fairhoper commented how these discussions somehow always led to the single tax theory. These meetings not only served as a means of resolving differences of opinion on all matters, but as an opportunity to socialize and to feel part of the community.

The great number of talented Fairhoppers led, by 1897, to regular community musical, literary, and intellectual discussion meetings. Every other Thursday evening was a music program, organized by an appointed chairman, for the entertainment of all Fairhope residents; these soon developed into large scale musical recitals, drama, and singing performances. Any Fairhoppers with such talents was not only welcome to participate but was anxiously recruited to do so. On the other Thursday evenings, Fairhoppers met for a general discussion of economic topics. In addition, the male residents occasionally presented various types of programs on these Thursday evenings. Then the community would meet every other Friday evening to enjoy a literary program where they read and discussed various works of literature. The Fairhope Single Tax Club met on the other Friday evenings. These activities were supplemented by occasional receptions at private homes and group outings to the park and the beach. Thus during the first three years, Fairhoppers came together regularly as a community for various forms of enjoyment.

As the village steadily grew during the next few years, additional group activities developed in response to the residents' needs and desires. In 1899, Fair-



hoppers decided to hold a general bi-weekly sociable in order "to give an opportunity for all to get together for cultivation of mutual good fellowship and greeting of new arrivals." Different forms of entertainment, in addition to 'breaks' in the program for socializing, were provided at these gatherings. That same year, the community began a regular series of dances on Saturday evenings; Marie Howland noted that most residents, both young and old, thoroughly enjoyed this activity.

The residents also began organizing clubs representing their varied interests. Women, who were extremely active in all aspects of the community, formed many 'women only' clubs. The Fairhope women's Suffrage Society and the Fairhope Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were the most prominent. The Suffrage Society, formed in 1898, met once a month to discuss "what makes the best home, the best mental, moral and spiritual atmosphere for themselves and their children." As is evident by its name, the society was also deeply concerned with the issue of women's suffrage and occasionally invited prominent speakers to lecture at the club. The WCTU, organized in 1898 too, enjoyed visits from many prominent speakers associated with the national temperance movement and exercised a significant moral influence upon the community's daily life. Other 'women only' clubs in Fairhope were the Literary Review Club, the Women's Social Science Club, and the Women's Single Tax Club. The Greeno Mason's Lodge was the sole 'men only' club in the community.

In addition, Fairhope celebrated the major holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Independence Day. In the early years, the colonists gathered together for appropriate services and ate as a group in 'cooperative' dinners. Perhaps most importantly, all of the residents came together every January to celebrate the establishment of Fairhope; this was an elaborate ceremony, marked by music and speeches. At this event, all Fairhoppers celebrated their existence as a group.

Fairhoppers also banded together, although in much smaller numbers, for various cooperative economic endeavors. Perhaps the most successful and long-lasting of these was the Labor Exchange, begun in 1896 by eleven colonists. Exemplifying the Fairhope philosophy of voluntary cooperation for mutual benefit, its members, which included non-Fairhoppers, offered goods and services for sale at the Exchange store, receiving in return notes good toward the purchase of other items in the store. The

Exchange members also pooled their capital to build a cottage which they rented out successfully. This venture met with much success until business began to taper off after 1899. After a reorganization in 1903, the Exchange grew with new vitality. Although mostly run by Fairhoppers, the Exchange never comprised more than a minority of Fairhoppers.

Another cooperative economic endeavor was the Fruit, Flower, and Vegetable Growers Association. The first reference to it appears in the Courier in 1897. Including residents from neighboring communities, this association developed into the Baldwin County Agricultural Society (BCAS) in 1902. The BCAS, which included a relatively small number of Fairhoppers, discussed economic subjects of use to its members such as the use of new fertilizers. The society later organized a shipping and storage facility on the Fairhope wharf for its members.

Other cooperative ventures were the very successful Fairhope Fishing Club, which was formed in 1895 and ensured its members a steady supply of fish from the nearby bay, and the much smaller Fairhope Economic Living Club, which was formed in 1901 between six different households that worked together to prepare their dinners.

Having renounced their ties with the outside world, Fairhoppers thus developed their own multi-faceted busy society to satisfy their emotional, intellectual, and economic needs. That these activities adequately replaced their former relationships is evidenced by one Fairhopper's comment in 1903 that "the whole time seems to be given to sociables, clubs, leagues, societies, anniversaries, concerts, dances, endeavor meetings, commemoration services, surprise and other parties." <sup>16</sup> Interacting with each other frequently, Fairhoppers consequently developed a strong sense of community and solidarity which ensured the smooth functioning of the community and increased its ability to withstand dangers from within and without.

As Fairhope grew larger, it naturally became harder to maintain close relationships with everyone. Many of the newcomers to Fairhope after 1900 also seemed to have backgrounds rather different from those already in residence; they were not as interested in the single tax or socialism or literary readings, etc.. The early sense of community consequently weakened somewhat in the presence of an increasing number of these types of people.

Perhaps the most important commitment mechanism in Fairhope was that of Transcendence, which deals with the community's moral commitment to its stated ideology. It means the identification with something higher and greater than one's personal self; something which not only provides order and meaning to an individual's life, but also a sense of rightness, certainty, and conviction. Successful creation of a feeling of transcendence in a utopian community resulted from the willingness of its members to put the community's, not their own, interests first in matters of importance; this was accomplished with a considerable degree of success in Fairhope.

The avowed ideology of Fairhope was the Single Tax theory. This theory advocated the adoption of an economic reform which ostensibly would correct many of the basic injustices in society stemming from the present economic system. It was formulated in response to what was seen as a society marked "with the constant narrowing of opportunities as one industry after another goes into the hands of trusts and the broad acres of our common heritage pass under the control of speculators." Single taxers believed that many of the problems of society, especially poverty, resulted from the present system of taxation. They asserted that all land belonged to society; therefore, occupiers of land should pay for the privilege of using it. The amount paid, i.e. the rent, varied naturally according to the value given it by society. If a person chose not to pay the rent, the land would be returned to society for others' use. Under the present system, single taxers argued, landowners benefitted from increases in land values created by the community, not as the result of any action on their part, as when the community builds a highway next to a previously isolated vacant lot. Thus society was making 'donations' to landowners since they were not paying back to society the benefits resulting from increases in land value.

Single taxers thus asserted that all land should be viewed as community owned and leased to whoever desired it. The amount of rent would be determined by the value accorded to it by society and society would not tax the improvements made upon the land or the produce derived from the use of it; the only tax levied would be the land tax. Not only would such a tax be more than equal to all current taxes, but "because society has gotten a fair return for all it gives, it has no right to levy any further."



Single taxers viewed their position as being a moral one; they claimed that the present economic system was unjust and immoral by allowing landowners to keep un-earned land value. They asserted that "individuals have not the right and should not have the power of diverting into their own pockets sources of wealth which do not belong to them."<sup>20</sup> They believed that the implementation of the single tax would, by according "equal opportunities to all and to the laborer the full product of his labor,"<sup>21</sup> eliminate many of society's ills. Thus the single tax meant :

"the collective administration of natural resources in order to secure that equal access to them which is every man's birthright. It assumes no control over capital, but holds sacred the right of every man to that which he has produced by his labor applied to natural resources - or its equivalent gained in free exchange."<sup>22</sup>

This was the theory to which Fairhoppers subscribed and they firmly believed it would result in a better, more just ,society. In applying this theory to the formation of a model single tax community, the Fairhope founders based its organization on what they termed the 'Law of Equal Freedom'- "every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, their Socialist friends professed as their motto, "each for all and all for each" and "from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs."<sup>24</sup> The FIA viewed the role of the community in relation to the individual in terms of the theory of cooperative individualism, encouraging , but not requiring, many forms of cooperation. This principle stemmed from the view holding

the full reward of individual effort to be the best incentive to labor, and calculated to secure the most efficient methods; and that the competition of free men under free conditions will reward effort more justly than any scheme of communal distribution which can ever be devised.<sup>25</sup>

This was the view of human nature and organization professed by most Fairhoppers, and this was the ideal which the colonists had in their hearts and minds when they came together to form a model community to demonstrate its feasibility to themselves and the rest of the world.

The Fairhope plan thus entailed application of the Law of Equal Freedom in holding and use through the collection of economic rent in government by



personal vote, initiative, and referendum. The FIA administered the 'natural monopolies' of transportation, electricity, water, etc. in the interests of the community.

And how did the Fairhoppers view themselves in regard to this lofty utopian plan? It appears that most of the colonists, at least in the first five years, were extremely conscious of and committed to the view of Fairhope as a model single tax community. At a memorial service for Henry George, their ideological mentor, they reaffirmed "allegiance to the principles of equity he pursued and to consecrate ourselves anew to the sacred task of carrying forward the work he left unfinished." That the Fairhoppers considered themselves "pioneers" is revealed in the Courier which wrote "Fairhope wants pioneers with perseverance and faith in equal freedom." They also often referred to themselves as the "only colony in the world practically applying the 'law of equal freedom'," and as an "enlightened community." That they believed they were a special group of people is evident by the description, in the Courier, of Fairhoppers as having "energy, intelligence, agreeableness, integrity, generosity," and as being "public-spirited, sociable, hospitable, and broad-minded."

The early Fairhoppers felt strongly about their 'mission' in the world to establish their model community. In 1896, the Courier pointedly remarked that "we have a corps of members who can be always depended upon to hold the interests of Fairhope paramount to all others, even their own private interests." That this commitment to their ideals persists is shown by the Courier's later comment, in 1898, that "I doubt if there is a community in which a better feeling prevails or there is as much mutual confidence and unity of purpose."

Fairhoppers' sense of purpose was noted by FIA President Coleman in the 1899 Fairhope anniversary speech when he characterized Fairhope as a "fertile blossom" out of which "something greater, grander, nobler (shall) succeed." Gaston, the appointed historian, then went on to compare Fairhoppers to the founders of the United States, referring the first settlers in Fairhope as "pioneers" and as the "Pilgrim fathers and mothers of Fairhope." Like the Pilgrims, Gaston observed, they came to Fairhope because "they believed certain customs and practises time-

honored and by most people unquestioned, to be essentially wrong, and resolved that they would cease practising them." The Fairhoppers thus saw themselves as reformers seeking to escape a corrupt society to establish a more perfect one.

This unity of feeling and sense of purpose in Fairhope was seriously threatened only once in its early years. In 1895, the community underwent a power struggle ostensibly over differences of opinion of how the single tax theory could be best applied in Fairhope. One faction, led by the Springers and Brokaws, attempted to 'unseat' the other faction, led by E.B. Gaston. The Springers and Brokaws, prominent single taxers, had just recently arrived in the colony and had proposed various constitutional revisions which they claimed would purify the application of the single tax and lead to its greater success in Fairhope. The ensuing clash was later described by Gaston as one "when it really seemed that the whole structure might fall to the ground in the clash of differing ideas and factions." Some of the most important proposals dealt with the lowering of the membership fee to \$25, permitting a bare majority to amend the constitution, and permitting only members to reside in Fairhope. Each group viewed the actions of the other as an attempt to place their "faction in control." The response of the supporters of Gaston was to petition the Executive Council of the FIA for the recall of Springer, Brokaw, and Polly (part of this faction), noting that "the accustomed good feeling and unity of purpose among Fairhoppers, which has made possible the accomplishments of so much during the past year, no longer exists." They went on to state that "the present management of the Courier (by Springer) and of the association (by Springer, Brokaw, and Pollay), through the Executive Council, is not approved by a majority of the members, but is in direct violation of their wishes and against their protest." Feelings grew intense as arguing and politicking increased. At the special election, Gaston's group succeeded in recalling Springer, Brokaw, and Pollay and in voting down the proposed constitutional revisions. Within a year, the Springers and the Brokaws left Fairhope permanently. Others left too as a result of the bitterness of the conflict. After the outcome, the Courier noted that Fairhope was again in the hands of friends. The long term results of this conflict were limited probably because the prime instigators of this conflict

left Fairhope after they lost the vote, leaving behind those who were never fervently converted to their position. The Courier thus observed a few months later the presence of "a very pronounced feeling among the members to let well enough alone." This conflict apparently resulted in a strengthening of the community's sense of purpose. Although the settlers still had differences of opinion, none were so intense as to cause any members to leave the colony. As Gaston remarked in 1899, "none have left Fairhope in the past three years because of dissatisfaction with its plans or management; a few left because of dissatisfaction with the country or did not find sufficient business in their field."<sup>41</sup>

That the settlers' sense of purpose remained and grew stronger after this controversy is evident by Mrs. Brown's comment at Fairhope's anniversary celebration in 1902 that "Fairhope is the only Single Tax Colony in the world, organized to banish poverty or even the fear of poverty. We have God's moral law in practice and we will be the desired wedge in falling our present unjust and oppressive industrial system."<sup>42</sup> In the following year's anniversary celebration, Bellangee echoes this view of Fairhope's "mission in the world."<sup>43</sup> He claims that there "is not in the United States on equal number of people in any group, whose influence upon the civilization of our country and the destiny of our people for the next ten years will be greater than that of the little company who are making homes in Fairhope."<sup>44</sup> He saw their experiment as "an opportunity to build an ideal city with an ideal civilization."<sup>45</sup>

The year of 1904 marked yet another rise in the spirits of the idealistic Fairhoppers. In their anniversary celebration, Bellangee noted that "it was with the greatest degree of sadness that I noted among all classes the almost complete abandonment of hope as to the possibility of establishing justice and honor in business and politics. It is for Fairhope to inspire hope, to lead the way, and to hold aloft the banner of success."<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the best characterization of the role of ideology in Fairhope was made by Miss Alice Herring, a frequent visitor who later became a resident of Fairhope, who wrote:



No matter how great the number of subjects upon which Fairhoppers may disagree, they are united upon one subject: namely, that there is something wrong with the present economic system. There may be a wide difference of opinion as to just what is the matter, and as to the best remedy; but the very fact of their presence in Fairhope proves that they think the principle it is applying is one way out, and presumably the best they know. The unity of thought and purpose upon this subject, and the willingness of a large majority to make almost any personal sacrifice in order to further the community interests creates an atmosphere of sympathy and comradeship that is the strongest and pleasantest impression any one will carry away from Fairhope. Even if he does not realize it fully while there, he will when he gets away and feels its absence in other places. No one can understand until he has experienced the comradeship of common interest, what a dead thing existence is without this vital element.<sup>47</sup>

That same year of 1904 was marked by three important manifestations of this spirit: In May 1904, the members of the Fairhope Industrial Association changed its name to the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation. In that same month, the Courier noted that "Fairhope has decided to blow its own horn a little more vigorously and will put on the pier head a sign saying 'Fairhope-a Single Tax Colony ... no speculation for anybody.'" Two months later, Fairhoppers, on the initiative of Miss Chapman, raised a Single Tax flag outside of her house; explaining the flag's symbolic meaning, the Courier wrote, "the blue of the main field signifies intelligence and progress; the red of the smaller field is brotherhood, one blood the world over. The globe is the earth; and the motto encircling it, 'the Earth for All,' is the noblest that could adorn any flag, and the most exalted and radical sentiment of this age."<sup>48</sup>

From reading these remarks and about Fairhoppers' activities during the first ten years, it is apparent that dedicated single taxers in Fairhope successfully converted many of the other residents to this theory, and thus the ideals of Fairhope. Yet not all were single taxers; a significant minority were socialistically inclined or just remained nonbelievers. The differences of ideology in Fairhope were reflected early in Fairhope in the reaction to the dissolution of the Fairhope Mercantile Department. While many of the residents had considered the venture too socialistic and therefore undesirable, others disagreed and soon created the Labor Exchange, an informal substitute. Fairhope attracted a number of former members of the socialistic communities of Ruskin, Topolobampo, as well as others. At the



same time, however, Fairhope still attracted single taxers as is evidenced by the large influx of single taxers from New Jersey in 1901. Socialists and others who might disagree with the FIA plan were tolerated completely as long as their actions did not pose a threat to the community's goals. This concern is reflected in the pledge of loyalty to the FIA's principles required of all FIA members and in Easton's remark, in 1900, that "no one is admitted to membership in the FIA who is not believed to be in full sympathy with its plans." One probable explanation for the small number of FIA members after 1900 is that many residents who applied or might have applied for membership did not agree with FIA principles or practices.

The problem which grew increasingly worse after 1900 was a controversy about the fixing of rents in Fairhope. As rents were extremely low in the first five years of Fairhope and there were still relatively few non-member residents, complaints were few in number. During the next five years, however, Fairhope witnessed rapid growth in population and in economic development. The FIA accordingly began, in 1901, to raise rents by greater percentages each year. Noting an increasing number of complaints beginning in 1902, the Courier consequently observed the presence of "much lack of understanding and appreciation of those principles (FIA's) by some of those entering complaints." The controversy worsened in the next year and the FIA came under attack from "a few who are not in sympathy with the colony and seem wholly unable to grasp the spirit and purpose of those who established it." The Courier even suggested that these disaffected residents leave Fairhope, saying, "those who approve them (FIA plans) are cordially invited to share their benefits with us. Those who don't are as cordially invited to locate elsewhere." The 1904 general meeting to discuss rents was marked by much apprehension and dissent despite the almost unanimous final approval by FIA members. In an apparent attempt to temper this increasing dissent, the FIA Executive Council afterwards decided to "recognize the equal interest of all in all public matters by giving the same consideration to petitions and suggestions from nonmembers as from members." Nonmembers were additionally permitted to call for referendums, although the vote on all matters was still strictly reserved for FIA members. The Executive Council also opened its regular meetings to the public and invited participation.

When the FIA subsequently made its rent appraisals for 1905 in November, 1904, a group of tenants presented the Executive Council with a statement outlining their objections to the rent increases. In response, the FIA decided to permit nonmember lessees to participate in decision-making process, including voting, for revenue expenditures for 1905. The FIA members themselves, however, were seriously divided over the 1905 rent appraisals. The complaining tenants met again with the FIA and argued that rent should not be increased if the community exhibits no apparent need for additional revenue. This proposition clearly reveals the lack of understanding and commitment to the ideals and purpose of Fairhope by this group. The Executive Council asserted its intention to continue to collect the full economic rent each year. In January, 1905, the FIA members finally approved the 1905 rent appraisals, not only by a vote of 18 to 11. The following year this conflict peaked and later subsided. This membership vote indicated that even some members disagreed enough with the application of the single tax in Fairhope to vote against the rent increases. These members, in contrast to other dissenting tenants, still believed strongly in the utopian philosophy of Fairhope.

Fairhoppers' confidence and dedication to their experiment in the single tax was, however, buffeted more significantly and effectively by the persistent criticism and often indifference of national single tax organizations. From its very inception, Fairhope had trouble attracting single taxers either to come to Fairhope or to give it financial or verbal support. Their reluctance to do so stemmed from a number of reasons. First, most single taxers did not believe that their theory could be demonstrated by a colony since such a colony would have to deal with regular local, state, and national taxes. Instead they asserted that the single tax theory could be demonstrated only on a large scale, the minimum probably being an entire state. To accomplish this goal, single taxers therefore devoted their resources to converting the states to single tax through politics. Despite their lack of success in such endeavors, notably in Delaware, single taxers continued to ignore Fairhope.

Other single taxers supported the efforts of Fairhope but were afraid to do so fully for fear that Fairhope's success/failure would then be viewed as the success/

failure of the single tax theory.

Still others disapproved of the Fairhope plan on the grounds that it contained too many improper applications of the single tax theory. Many also, at least initially believed that there was a strong socialistic element in Fairhope.

Those that spoke out often did so very critically. Fairhoppers thus exhibited a constant defensiveness about their colony. The Courier periodically took great pains to explain that Fairhope has no socialistic features and that the only type of cooperation is voluntary. The Courier also is filled with pleas for more financial support from single taxers, while simultaneously asserting that although the aid will be helpful, it is not necessary. In addition, the Courier takes every opportunity to argue that the Fairhope experiment was a better, more fruitful idea than were the political efforts of single taxers.

In its articles, the Courier clearly revealed the bitterness that Fairhoppers felt towards other single taxers for not according Fairhope the recognition they believed it deserved. Although the Courier asserted, in 1897, that "knowing the prejudice in the mind of many single taxers against the colony efforts and fearing to provoke controversies which might be detrimental to the cause at large, Fairhope has never sought the endorsement of any single tax association," Fairhoppers jumped at every hint that single tax organizations were interested in helping or in recognizing Fairhope.<sup>55</sup> Thus later that same year when the Chicago Single Tax Club offered to raise money for Fairhope, the Courier expressed feelings of elation. After Gaston arrived in Chicago, the organization demanded that Fairhope make certain constitutional changes first. Smarting from this action, the Courier lashed out at the Chicago Club in the next issue of the paper. Fairhoppers experienced an increase in criticism following this incident, significantly by the National Single Tax magazine. That this criticism was deeply felt by the colonists is evident by the Courier's retort, in 1900, that "Fairhoppers resent the implication that in coming to Fairhope, we are running away from the larger fight for the Single Tax."<sup>56</sup>

Anxiously hoping for recognition by single taxers, but still on the defensive from earlier criticism, Fairhoppers were overjoyed when the Women's National Single Tax League gave Fairhope, in 1902, the "first official recognition accorded it by a



Fairhope decided to send Bellangee on a nation-wide speaking tour to spread knowledge of the single tax and Fairhope and hopefully acquire more official and financial support from single taxers. Bellangee met with so much success that he repeated his tour in the following year. Buoyed by these signs, the Fairhope Executive Council extended a general invitation, in December 1904, to "single taxers not only of the United States, but throughout the world to meet in conference at Fairhope" the following February.<sup>58</sup>

The general lack of support from national single tax organizations thus clearly dampened Fairhoppers' spirits. The FIA members were, however, so convinced of the correctness of their endeavor that they merely suppressed most of their bitterness and devoted themselves to this task with increased vigor. Their underlying anxiety is revealed, for example, in the 'Fairhope cheer,' created by Miss Chapman and approved in the Courier in 1903:

What's the matter with Fairhope?  
There's nothing the matter with Fairhope;  
She's all right!<sup>59</sup>

That most Fairhoppers were committed to the ideals of their community is apparent. Less obvious is the role played by a small group of leaders in the community; these men symbolized Fairhope's values and inspired followers. The most important were E.B. Gaston and C.L. Coleman, and J. Bellangee to a lesser degree. Coleman, as secretary of the Executive Council and editor of the Courier, positions maintained with the exception of one brief interruption, vocalized the ideals of Fairhope and defended the community's efforts against all critics. One of the principal architects of the Fairhope plan, Gaston took the lead in encouraging Fairhoppers to pull together in times of difficulty, to dedicate themselves to their plan, and to believe in the single tax. He held the FIA members firmly together against efforts by other residents to sway them from the course set by the Fairhope plan. Coleman was also one of the original settlers and held the position of president of the Executive Council a number of times. He too helped develop and maintain the bonds of commitment among Fairhoppers. That these men played a major role in guiding the colony is evidenced by an allegation, in 1898, that they were



<sup>60</sup> "despots." A more sympathetic portrayal of their tremendous influence in the community was provided by Rev. Tucker the following year when he said, "through the determination of a few leaders, Fairhope is coping with its problems." <sup>61</sup> Without their leadership, the Fairhope experiment, would not only have never begun, but would probably have failed quickly.

Under strong leadership, the colonists worked hard during the first ten years to establish their village. By 1898, Gaston was able to comment that Fairhope is on a substantial self-supporting basis and entirely independent of <sup>62</sup> outside support." As a result of the subsequent influx of people and business, Fairhope rapidly achieved economic stability, prompting Marie Howland to comment, <sup>63</sup> in 1900, that it was "the most prosperous, most alive town in this big county." With this increased prosperity, Fairhoppers thus enjoyed the fruits of their years of hard labor.

Fairhope was a well-established and growing community by 1905. With the exception of a small minority, most Fairhoppers regularly interacted with each other in a wide variety of activities and identified their personal values, norms, and goals with those of their community. In the absence of any of the commitment mechanisms of Sacrifice, Investment, Renunciation, Communion, and Transcendence which were present in the community during its first ten years of existence, Fairhope might well have gone the way of most utopian experiments and disintegrated after a few years. But the successful combination of these factors during this period effectively reduced Fairhoppers' prior commitments and, in their stead, developed strong bonds between them as individuals and as a group, thus ensuring the survival of this 'model community.'

ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Kanter, Commitment and Community, p.1
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.1
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.64
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.66
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.72
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.72
- <sup>7</sup>Fairhope Courier, April 15, 1899
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1900
- <sup>9</sup>Zablocki, Alienation and Charisma, p.284
- <sup>10</sup>Kanter, p.82
- <sup>11</sup>Courier, August 1, 1900
- <sup>12</sup>Zablocki, p.284
- <sup>13</sup>Kanter, p.93
- <sup>14</sup>Courier, November 1, 1899
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1899
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1903
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1903
- <sup>18</sup>Kanter, p.114
- <sup>19</sup>Courier, February 15, 1895
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1903
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1895
- <sup>22</sup>~~Ibid., November 15, 1899~~
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1895

- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1895
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1895
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., December 1, 1897
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., November 1, 1896
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., November 1, 1897
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., July 15, 1898
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., July 15, 1898
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1896
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1898
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1899
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1899
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1897
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1899
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1896
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1896
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1896
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., April 1, 1896
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1899
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1902
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1903
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1903
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1903
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1904
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., April 1, 1904

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1904

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., August 1, 1904

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1900

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1902

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1903

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1903

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1904

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1897

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., June 1, 1900

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1903

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1904

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., October 1, 1903

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1898

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1899

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., October 1, 1898

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., July 15, 1900



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